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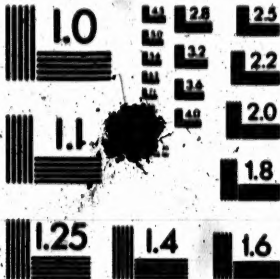
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"Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness."

PRAYER TO BE SAID ON COMING INTO CHURCH.

GOD, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all Godliness; be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER TO BE SAID BEFORE LEAVING CHURCH.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast instructed thy Holy Church with the Heavenly Doctrine of thy word; give us grace that being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy Holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

OUR PRAYER BOOK

IS called the Book of Common Prayer. Let it be so indeed to us. Let us all kneel in prayer, stand in praise, and join heartily, audibly and unitedly in saying the responses and in singing the chants and hymns.

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A SERMON

PREACHED BY THE

Rev. F. Harding, Incumbent of Trinity Church, Mitchell,

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD, 1873.

“Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness.”—PSALM XXIX, v. 2.

You all notice cards in your pews this morning, containing this text. These cards meet a want which has been for a long time apparent to me, and has been to some extent, I know not how widely, or how deeply, felt among you. These cards call attention to a reverent, a Godly, and, I believe, a profitable custom which many of us either forget or habitually neglect. They call attention to the time-honored and, I believe, God-honored custom of kneeling when you come into church for the blessing of Him who seeth in secret and rewardeth openly. They also call attention to the equally Godly, equally churchly, equally reverent, and equally profitable custom of remaining a moment on our knees after the apostolic benediction has been pronounced. I trust and hope that those cards may be the means of helping us to establish this good old custom amongst ourselves. I have no wish to bind you down to the use of those prayers, though I am sure they are very appropriate and besides have this to recommend them to us that they are taken from that book which next to the Bible is dearest to our hearts. I only ask that they at least may be taken as a guide by all, and as a help by all who need it. This good custom once established we can leave the result with God, relying on the promise of his Son, which is a promise to all his people “whatsoever ye shall ask of God in prayer, believing ye shall receive.” But those cards aim at something more than the establishment of the good old custom of offering up a private prayer at the opening and close of public worship. They aim at making the whole service of prayer and praise more like what it ought to be, and more like what in itself it is so admirably fitted to be. They aim at leading us all to give more earnest heed that in our whole conduct when assembled together in God’s house the apostolic precept “Let all things be done decently and in order,” may find its complete fulfillment. They aim at leading us to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” In our prayer Books there are directions given as to the changes of posture on the part of the people as well as on the part of the minister. The general principle which runs through all these directions is brought before us in the cards in the words “Let us all kneel in prayer and stand in praise.” In these directions the prayer book has reason and scripture on her side, these being at once the

most becoming and the most scriptural postures for those who would offer up prayer and praise to the supreme Being. I preached to you on this subject once before and I am glad, yea thankful to almighty God, to be able to say that that sermon was not without effect. I am thankful to be able to say that while before that time kneeling was the exception now it is the rule. I return to the subject now in the humble hope that the exceptions to the rule may be fewer, that, if possible, kneeling in prayer may become as standing in praise already is a universal custom amongst us.

Just think, brethren, is it becoming for us to sit at our ease while we pour into the ear of God the confession of our sins, and ask that for his Son's sake those sins may be forgiven? Is this a fitting posture for us to take when our lips are offering up such words as these: "Oh God, the father of Heaven have mercy upon us miserable sinners?" I leave you to answer this, and trust that the answer will be a return, like loyal churchmen and like humble christians, to the posture that humble christians took from the first, and that loyal churchmen are directed by the rubrics of the book of common prayer to take. To my mind nothing tends so much to stamp the mark of unreality upon a service as a careless, listless posture, and I feel sure that if this careless listless posture do not begin in unreality, as it often does, it is very apt to lead to it. And here lies its danger. It may matter little, for his own sake, what attitude a man may take if he be not really praying. But when a man is really praying he will find a suitable attitude a help to devotion, and a help which we who are so given to wandering thoughts can ill afford to lose.

I need not enter into any arguments to prove the scripturalness or the catholicity of this attitude. We all know that kneeling and standing are the only attitudes for prayer recognized in scripture or by the universal church. And we all know that, except when prayers are to be offered for the people by one in the representative character of a priest or a minister, the great weight of the testimony both of the Bible and the church is in favor of the kneeling posture. Is it too much to hope that the few amongst us who have not formed this habit will now begin?

But unless we wish to make the service a dumb show there is something further necessary. I think we will best come at this by asking ourselves what is the purpose of our assembling in God's house? Why do we come here from Sunday to Sunday? Is it not in the first place, to worship God, and, in the second place, to hear his word read and preached? These are the great objects for which our solemn assemblies are held. Now mark the difference between these two objects. We come to hear God's word, and therefore should be listeners attentive devout listeners while it is being read or preached. But we do not come to hear prayers, we come to pray, and therefore should not be mere listeners to prayers offered by our minister. We should pray the prayers ourselves. We should pray with the spirit and with the understanding, with the heart and with

the voice. It is true we may, like Hannah of old, pray with the heart while no sound goeth forth from our lips. But we cannot pray publicly, and mark you, it is not to offer up our private devotions that we assemble here. It is rather that we may all, both high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, join in one common act of worship, in the name of one common mediator and in the presence of one God. Nor do we come to listen to singing. We go to the concert room for that; but when we come to church it is to sing. Oh let both choir and people think of this. Let the members of the choir remember that they sing not merely for men but to God, and let the people remember that the choir is here to lead and assist them in the service of praise, not to take that service away from them. Let us all remember that our service is for minister and people, not for minister and clerks, or for minister and choir, and therefore anything which keeps the people from joining in it, whether it be their own carelessness, or difficult music, or what ever it may be it is contrary to the spirit of the prayer book, and to the design of those who compiled it and called it the "Book of Common Prayer." If all the congregation were to act as many of its members do, keeping silence during the confession, the Lord's Prayer, the apostles, creed, the responses of the Litany, and were never to say "Amen" at the end of the prayers, for all the purposes of public prayer the people might almost as well be sitting by their own firesides and leave all the service in appearance as they do in reality to their minister. So, if none were to join in our beautiful psalms, and chants, and hymns, but the choir the congregation might almost as well be absent so far as praising God is concerned. Brethren this may seem strong language, but it is truth. I do not say that we cannot pray in church unless we pray aloud, or that we cannot make the prayer for ours which has been offered up by our minister without saying "Amen," so that others may hear, but I do say that audible prayers and audible amens are necessary to public prayer. So I do not say that no man can praise God in the "Venite" the "Te Deum," the "Jubilate Deo," and in the various psalms and hymns, without singing audibly but I do say that such worship however acceptable to God is not public worship.

But besides this which is bound up in the very nature of public worship, there are other good and weighty reasons why we should all endeavour to carry out the suggestions of the cards as to joining in the service with our lips as well as with our hearts. Feeling as I do the vast importance of this subject, and knowing as I do how very short we come in this respect, I shall endeavor to bring those reasons before you as plainly as I can. In the first place, loyalty to our church demands it of us. The church puts the prayer book in the hands of her children to be used, and has incorporated with it many wise and very plain rules to guide us in using it aright. As soon as the services have been begun by the minister reading one or more of the appointed sentences from God's word, the people are invited "to ac-

company him with a pure heart and humble voice unto the throne of the heavenly grace." Then follows the general confession, which according to the direction given "is to be said of the whole congregation, after the minister, all kneeling." Then follows the declaration of absolution from God to all those "who truly repent and unfeignedly believe his Holy Gospel," after which we find this direction "The people shall answer here and at the end of all the other prayers, amen." Then follows a direction that the people shall repeat the Lord's Prayer with the minister both here and wherever afterwards it is used in Divine Service. So on through the whole morning and evening prayer, the litany and communion service, and in every occasional office the people are assigned a part and are directed to take it either by joining audibly with their minister in the words of prayer and praise or by giving a hearty response. Manifestly then, if we would be loyal churchmen, we must sustain our part in the simple and beautiful service of the church; we must show our loyalty by a ready obedience to the directions which the church has given us. And, brethren, if for nothing else, the church which has given us the "Book of Common Prayer" with its reasonable, simple, comprehensive, and scriptural service which a child can understand, and which the mightiest minds of the world delight in, deserves the most loyal obedience of all her children.

In the second place, our own spiritual interests bid us take that part in the services which our church has marked out for us. If our assembling here is to do us any good it must be through the use that we make of the means of grace that we have here. Those who have come here to-day for a right end, and from a right motive, have come here for the benefit of themselves as individuals and for that of the congregation as a body. Now who are they who may naturally look for the largest share of the common benefit? Who but they who make the best use of the short time they are here by paying close attention to the whole service? Now if we are really in earnest in looking for benefit we will hail with delight anything that will enable us while here to keep the rein upon our wandering thoughts. We will be rejoiced to find anything that will help us to shut out all else but the prayers when we are praying, all else but God's word when it is being read or preached. Brethren I would like, for my own benefit to know, and for your benefit, to be able to point out to you some unfailing means to do this. But I cannot. I know that our nature and our circumstances are such that this cannot be. I know the devil is too active, the world too alluring, the flesh too weak, to allow the full consummation of this desire, before we reach that better world, and join that purer worship, from which the devil is excluded. But, if I cannot point you to an unfailing means, I can at least point you to a means which has been tried over and over again and has always proved effectual. I can say to you, and I say it with earnest desire for your good, be in your places regularly when service begins. Have your minds and hearts prepared by a silent prayer for

God's blessing and God's equinox. Then take your part all through the service. With a pure heart and humble voice speak out when your prayer book bids you. Follow your minister with mind and heart through all the prayers, and then at the conclusion of each, with a hearty "amen," stamp your own mark upon it, that, as yours, it may go up to the ear of God, and find acceptance there and bring you down a blessing. The more you strive to follow out this course, the less will your thoughts be distracted from the holy purpose for which christian men should meet in God's house, and the more will you be benefitted by the service. The very habit of always responding will keep your attention fixed on those parts which fall to the minister in order that you may be ready to respond promptly and intelligently when your time comes. Thus the beautiful liturgy of the church will be more firmly fixed in your minds, and will be more likely to influence your lives, entering into you and becoming a part of your very being.

Finally I would say the interest of each man's neighbor calls upon us all to do as is suggested on these cards. To join heartily, reverently, audibly, and unitedly in all the responses and in the chants and hymns. As a congregation we exert an influence either for good or evil on every stranger that comes within these walls. And each member of this congregation exerts a like influence on those around who see his conduct here. If a stranger come into church, say one of that sadly numerous class that seldom enters a church door, and see a whole congregation, or the majority, thrown into the most careless attitudes, and with an expression of listlessness on every face, while the service drags heavily on for the lack of a hearty response, he passes judgement upon that congregation. He says and rightly too that there is very little real worship there. And if this were all there would be but little harm done by these careless worshippers except to themselves. But this is not all. It is but a step from this judgement to the sweeping one which men are too apt to pass and which embraces the whole system of christianity in the condemnation which an insincere profession of it merits. Then let us for the sake of our fellowmen enter heartily into our services. Doing so we shall recommend to others our system of worship, which has no superior, if any equal, as a means of rendering that united public worship which is the natural consequence of a belief in "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and father of us all."

Oh! let us use our prayer book as a precious help to prayer. Let us use it in such a way as to benefit ourselves and also in such a way as to allow no one an opportunity of pointing to it as a drag upon the wheels of true devotion. If our services are cold it is not because we have a prayer book, but because we neglect the prayer book that we have.



